



News Release

For immediate release: January 7, 2009

(09-003)

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Flooding brings health and safety risks

Floodwaters affect shellfish safety, drinking water quality, cause injury risk

OLYMPIA — More than a dozen commercial Puget Sound shellfish areas have been closed due to contaminated run-off from floodwaters. And the state is advising recreational shellfish harvesters not to harvest oysters or clams from the Sound for at least a week.

Heavy rain in the Cascades and snowmelt are flooding rivers and lowlands, forcing many road closures. Rain and warmer temperatures are forecast for the next few days.

The state Department of Health is working with water systems to ensure they're equipped to deal with the flooding. Water quality issues are likely over the next several days, and some systems are already having challenges. Conditions change as floodwaters move through communities, so water systems are testing for contamination and will notify customers if problems are found.

If [water quality is in question](http://www.doh.wa.gov/phepr/handbook/purify.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/phepr/handbook/purify.htm), customers may be advised to use boiled or bottled water for drinking, brushing teeth, dishwashing, preparing food, and making ice. Before using the water, boil it for one minute and let it cool.

Flooding can cause big problems for people on private wells, too. Monitor private wells closely. If the well floods, assume the water is contaminated with disease-causing bacteria and parasites; switch to bottled or boiled water.

Drinking water can also be disinfected with a few drops of household bleach. Use 10 drops per gallon of water or one teaspoon for 10 gallons. Don't use scented or "color-safe" bleaches. Let the treated water stand 30 minutes before use.

—More—

Food items contacted by floodwater are considered contaminated and should be discarded. Canned food should be cleaned with detergent and water then disinfected in a weak bleach solution before opening. “When in doubt, throw it out!” If you lose power briefly, perishable food items may be safe to keep or refreeze if they’re cold to the touch, and have been maintained at a temperature below 45 degrees Fahrenheit.

If your home is flooded, turn the utilities off until emergency officials tell you it’s safe to turn them on. Avoid weakened floors, walls, and rooftops. Wash your hands frequently with soap and clean water if you come in contact with floodwaters. After floods recede, mold in homes should be cleaned as soon as possible. Wear rubber gloves, and use eye and breathing protection.

Carbon monoxide poisoning is a danger during storms when power can be out for long periods of time. Never burn charcoal inside your home, garage, or other enclosed area. Don’t burn charcoal in the fireplace in your home. Generators should only be used outside with proper ventilation — away from windows, doors, and vents that could allow carbon monoxide to come indoors.

Additional information on [weathering storms](http://www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/weather.htm) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/weather.htm>) is on the Department of Health’s Web site.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at http://www.doh.wa.gov for a healthy dose of information.
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